

Senate Bill 197  
March 14, 2013  
Presented by Ron Aasheim  
House Fish, Wildlife & Parks Committee

Mr. Chairman and committee members, I am Ron Aasheim, Administrator of Montana FWP's Communication and Education Division. I am here today as an informational witness.

In the way of background, in Montana individuals must be 12 years of age no later than January 16, of the year following the general hunting season in order to hunt and if born after January 1, 1985 must complete a hunter education course prior to purchasing a hunting license.

Approximately 6,500 individuals have taken hunter education in Montana annually over the last several years. Those individuals are instructed by approximately 1,300 volunteer hunter education instructors.

We have done a number of things in Montana to encourage youth participation. Those have included:

- Reduced prices and in some cases free licenses;
- Offering special hunting opportunities including early seasons and less restrictive licenses and season types.

First time Montana hunters, 18 and older, have the option of taking the classroom portion of hunter education on line.

In Montana, unlike in some states, there is no age limit or license required to hunt animals classified as non game such as rabbits, squirrels, fox and raccoon or coyotes which are classified as predators.

The testimony presented previously today is consistent with questions that we hear when discussing the issue and include:

- Should there be a minimum age to hunt?
- Is Montana's hunter education prerequisite a barrier to potential hunters?
- Should the state or parents decide when a youngster is ready to hunt?
- Should there be limits on the species of animal allowed to be taken?
- Is a mentor an adequate substitute for a hunter education course?
- What are the best approaches to recruiting new hunters?
- What might be the reactions to potential changes in hunter education and minimum age requirements from our hunter education instructors?

Thank you Mr. Chairman, I'm available to answer questions.